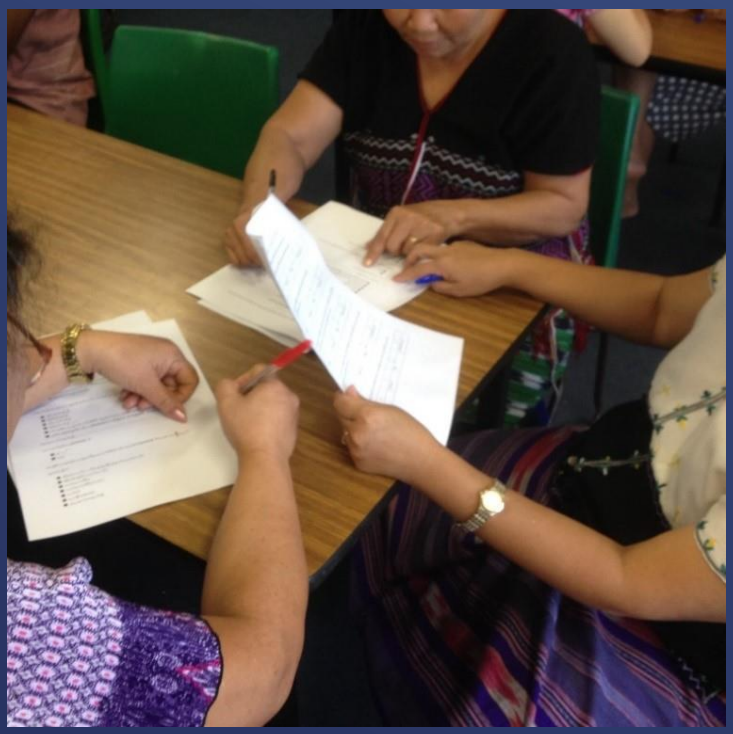
Refugee Settlers in South-east Queensland: Employment, Aspirations and Intergenerational Communication about Future Occupational Pathways

Final Report



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Every effort has been made to represent information accurately throughout the report. The authors apologise for any unintentional errors or omissions.

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Contents

List of Tables

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Executive Summary

This is the final report of the ARC linkage research project *Refugees' employment aspirations and inter-generational communication about future occupational pathways.* The project was based in South-east Queensland and was conducted over three years (2013, 2014, and 2015). The lead chief investigator was Dr Aparna Hebbani from the University of Queensland.

The project had three overall aims.
Aim 1: To investigate the employment experiences of recently arrived refugees.
Aims 2 and 3: To investigate refugees' aspirations for themselves and their children's educational and occupational futures.

Specifically, this study focused on the experiences of refugee settlers from Burma, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Ethiopia, which are among the top ten source countries for offshore humanitarian entrants (DIBP, 2013).

Data Collection

- Year 1: A survey of 222 adult refugee settlers from Burma (Chin, Karen and Karenni), Ethiopia (Amhara, Tigrians and Oromo), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), living in South-east Queensland.
- Year 2: Face-to-face interviews with 47 adult refugee settlers from Burma (Chin, Karen and Karenni), Ethiopia (Amhara and Tigrians), and the Democratic Republic of Congo living in South-east Queensland.

Key Findings

- Level of education, length of stay, and English language proficiency were predictors of employment.
- Underutilisation of skills and underemployment were major issues.
- English language proficiency not only affected employment, but also aspirations and levels of life satisfaction.
- Acculturation enhanced positive intergenerational communication; those who were more acculturated had more positive communication with their children.
- Many unemployed participants were unable to work due to ill health or because they were caring for an ill family member.
- How much contact parents had with schools was directly related to their aspirations for their children's future and in some cases, their English language proficiency. Increased involvement by parents in their children's lives and school system resulted in greater awareness about their children's education and employment aspirations.
- Many participants had strained relations with their neighbours.

Policy Implications

Policy makers could introduce the following measures to aid in refugee employment:

- Review refugees' skills and match their skills and work experience to assist their employment transition into appropriate jobs, as underutilisation was a major issue.
- Implement rural work schemes in regional areas close to major cities like Brisbane (in South-east Queensland, Sunshine Coast, Lockyer Valley, etc.) as many refugees in our study came from farming backgrounds.
- Provide financial support (e.g., low interest loans) and monetary assistance, so that new settlers can access relevant training and can gain skills and certificates for those who want to start their own businesses.
- Implement work placement programs to reduce acculturative stress for employed refugees.
- Offer English language classes for those who, despite completing the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), are still struggling with English.
- Provide respite services, so that people who are capable of working while still caring for an ill family member have the possibility of securing a part-time job. In such cases individuals should be provided with more opportunities to work from home (e.g., running day-care centres). They could also work in jobs such as cleaning for a few hours in the day (e.g. when their children are away at school.)
- Conduct programs to help recent arrivals to understand the pathways to employment; for example, to learn what education is required for certain jobs, as many people lacked information about employment pathways.
- Offer apprenticeships or voluntary positions to those refugees who lack local work experience, and hence, may be disadvantaged from getting employment.
- Some parents expressed having no or limited contact with schools and/or counsellors due to either their own ill health or English proficiency issues. As a result, many parents were unable to guide their children when it came to their children's educational pathways, even though they all had educational aspirations for their children. Hence, parents should have access to (school's or external) interpreting service, because it is important that they are properly informed about their children's progress.
- Expand homework clubs to various local schools with refugee student populations, as many parents in our study said they were unable to assist with homework due to low education and/or low/nil English language proficiency.
- Hold information sessions for parents about their children's access to tertiary education, including the financial cost, which is different for those with citizenship or permanent residence and those without such entitlements.
- Initiate programs to facilitate cultural awareness of diverse populations and learning about one another, as well as promote neighbourhood harmony through

organising cultural events, for example, around food, music, dressing, and dancing. Food is widely regarded as the best multicultural bridge.

- Also design a media campaign within the metropolitan region showcasing successful stories of refugee settlement.

Introduction/Literature Review

Employment and socio-demographic factors

There is substantial evidence that employment is important for social inclusion and successful resettlement in a new country (Ager & Strang, 2008; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003; Correa-Velez & Onsando, 2009; Valtonen, 2004). Unemployment, on the other hand, seriously hinders resettlement of refugees (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003). It is therefore important to understand the factors impacting on employment. Further, it is important to explore the role socio-demographic and psychosocial factors play in predicting employment status in order to understand how to assist refugees in securing jobs.

A range of socio-demographic factors have been found to be associated with employment success; for example, length of residence in Australia is a major predictor of employment success (Hugo, 2011; Correa-Velez, Barnett, & Gifford, 2013), alongside English proficiency (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007; Hebbani & Colic-Peisker, 2012; Hebbani & Preece, 2015; Hugo, 2011; Richardson, Healy, Stack, Ilsley, Lester, & Horrocks, 2004). Richardson et al. (2004) found that employment was related to age (highest among prime-age migrants 25-44 years old). Gender is also a predictor of employment status; most studies (Richardson et al., 2004; Hugo, 2011) report men are more likely to be either employed or unemployed, while women are more likely not to be in the labour force at all. Education, completed overseas or in the host country, is also crucial in securing employment. Hugo (2011) found that length of time, gender and education were all predictors of employment; however, there were significant discrepancies among qualifications and occupational status. Country of origin has been found to affect employment outcomes. Correa-Velez, Barnett and Gifford's (2013) Australian study found that African-born participants were ten times more likely to be employed than those born in Southeast Asia. Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2007) found that the employment status of former Yugoslavs was significantly better than that of Africans and 'Middle Easterners', in their view partly due to their 'whiteness'.

Acculturation

Typically, refugees arrive in Australia having experienced significant hardships, which can make their acculturation process more difficult. Berry (1997) defined acculturation as "how individuals who have developed in one cultural context manage to adapt to new contexts that result from migration" (p. 6). During this process refugees interact with the host society and adopt the culture, beliefs, traditions and interaction style of the host society. However, for most refugees, adjusting to a new culture can be a difficult and confusing experience. Berry posits four main types of acculturation along two dimensions (attitude to the host society and attitude toward the home society): assimilation, where migrants absorb the host culture and assimilate to it; integration, where migrants blend with the new culture but retain elements of the old one (perhaps

switching cultures in different contexts or blending elements of both cultures); segregation, where migrants retain their identity with the old culture and reject the new one; and marginalization or individuation, where migrants reject both the old and the new cultures and isolate themselves or alternatively operate from a personal identity like occupation (Berry, 1997; Sam, 2006).

Several studies have looked at the acculturation challenges faced by refugees as part of settling into a new host culture (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003; Hebbani, Obijiofor, & Bristed, 2012). According to Berry (2003), "when acculturation experiences cause problems for acculturating individuals, it results in the phenomenon of acculturative stress" (p. 26).

Acculturative stress

The acculturation process goes hand in hand with acculturative stress, which is an experience of psychosocial distress and can result in mental health concerns (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). Many factors influence acculturative stress, including exposure to discrimination and rejection by the host society; stigma, poor self-concept and low self-esteem; intergenerational and interpersonal family conflict; language difficulties; financial hardships; and unemployment and underemployment (DSS, 2011). As acculturation increases, acculturative stress usually decreases (Berry et al., 1987; Berry, 2006). Enhanced acculturation and reduced acculturative stress can play an important part in refugees' ability to secure employment (Berry, 2006; Sam, 2006). Their adaptation to the host society and an understanding of the local systems, cultures, and behaviours facilitate securing employment. Similarly, refugees use their resilience to cope with stressors; however, the relationship of this personal strength with employment success has not been sufficiently explored.

Employment aspirations

Previous studies have found that a range of socio-demographic factors, such as age, gender, education, English proficiency, length of stay in Australia, country of origin, and employment status, can all influence the aspirations that refugees have about their future employment (Correa-Velez et al., 2013; Correa-Velez & Onsando, 2009; Gutman, Schoon, & Sabates, 2012; Kostenko, 2009; Pietka-Nykaza, 2015; Valencia & Johnson, 2006). Tlhabano and Schweitzer (2007) found that economic difficulties did not seem to influence aspirations choices amongst African refugees in Australia while Willott and Stevenson (2013) found that already employed refugees (in low-paid, low-skilled jobs) were looking for opportunities to retrain or gain different employment. Knowing that employment plays a vital role in the refugee settlement process, we investigated what factors are associated with refugees' employment aspirations. The idea of aspirations captures the future hopes and plans of individuals without considering possible barriers (Coates, Skrbis, & Western 2008). Coates, Skrbis and Western (2008) say that "according to status attainment theory, aspirations help explain why some individuals are

socially mobile and why others are not" (p.3). Results suggest that having a job, especially a skilled job, boosts male immigrants' life satisfaction, while having no effects on their female counterparts (Kostenko, 2009). In the current analyses, job aspirations were defined as the difference between the current and ideal job.

Resilience

In spite of acculturation challenges and acculturative stress, refugees show remarkable resilience in coping in the new environment. Resilience is defined as "an outcome of successful adaptation to adversity" (Zautra, Hall, & Murray, 2010, p. 4). It comprises personal strengths and behaviours that can be utilised to avoid the negative effects of adversities (Masten, 2009) and consists of interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities and skills used to successfully adapt to life stressors (Ungar, 2008). Recently, research has highlighted refugees' capacity to cope and manage their pre- and post-migration challenges (Khawaja, Moisuc, & Ramirez, 2014; Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, & Greenslade, 2008). However, the role resilience may play in obtaining employment has not been explored in many studies. Further, the role that personal strengths and positive coping strategies play in the life satisfaction of refugees has not been sufficiently examined.

Intergenerational communication in refugee families

As Segrin and Flora (2005) noted, "family relationships are important, salient, long lasting, and central to people's wellbeing" (p. 2). Dysfunctional family communication in the context of dissonant acculturation is likely to exacerbate the problems refugees and their children experience. Both the Australian and international literatures indicate that acculturative stress (Berry, 1997; Kim, 2001, 2005; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001) not only jeopardises the mental and physical health of individuals, but also disturbs family relationships (see Fox, 1991; Hebbani, Obijiofor, & Bristed, 2009, 2010). One of the issues central to our project is "dissonant acculturation": for example, children learn English and acculturate at a faster pace than their parents (Berry, 1997; Hebbani, Obijiofor, & Bristed, 2010; Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Santisteban & Mitrani, 2003). The authority of refugee parents and their ability to be inspiring role models may also be threatened by their unemployment or loss of occupational status, low income, lack of English language proficiency, and lack of social capital. Thus, it is important to investigate the state of intergenerational relations in the immediate family (although the scope of this study is limited to the parents' perspective). The lack of employment success of refugees may not only affect their own lives but also the future prospects of their children. Furthermore, some refugee groups (and parents within them) may be hopeful for their children and also have a strong will to act to bring about a better future; other groups may be hopeful but more passive. Moreover, children of migrants are an important transitional group between their parents as migrants and the general population of the host country; their success or failure in status attainment is,

therefore, a good indicator of the social outcomes of migration (Coates, Skrbis & Western, 2008).

Not much is known about *refugee* parents' communication style with their children. The literature from the West indicates that effective parents engage with their children and communicate regularly. However, the communication can be positive or negative. The literature indicates that positive communication with children is marked by mutual respect, good 'quality time' with children, openness in discussing problems, and parents' ability to advise children.

This aspect of the project, therefore, had two goals: first, to explore the pattern of positive communication participants use with their children, and second, to examine the role socio-demographic and psychosocial factors play in participants' communication with their children. It was hypothesised that socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, education, employment status, country of origin, and duration of stay in Australia, as well as psychosocial factors such as higher acculturation and lower acculturative stress and high life satisfaction, would increase parents' probability of engaging in positive communication**.**

Intergenerational communication about aspirations

Refugee families include parents and children. Parents, as adults, have the primary responsibility for playing an active role in resettlement, and parents hope that their children will lead a better life (Omar, 2005). Yet refugee parents face significant challenges in the settlement process. While parents are pursuing their employment goals, their children are adjusting to the Australian educational system. Their success in labour market/education respectively is crucial for their future. It is within this context that it becomes important to explore communication between parents and their children.

A review of the literature indicates that certain socio-demographic factors (e.g., gender, country of origin) of refugee parents help to promote their interest and involvement with their children's education and future employment (Guo, 2014). Individuals with these characteristics monitor their children's education and employment, and guide them toward effective career choices. Refugees from all backgrounds seem dedicated to improving their lives and the lives of their children (Atwell, Gifford, & McDonald-Wilmsen, 2009; Omar, 2005). In general, they all have high employment aspirations for themselves and other family members (Atwell et al., 2009).

The present project explored the messages from parents to their children about future educational and employment aspirations. There were two goals with respect to communication about aspirations: first, to examine the participants' patterns of aspirational communication, and second, to examine whether socio-demographic and psychosocial factors impacted on the communication of future aspirations. It was hypothesised that socio-demographic factors such as duration of stay in Australia, age,

gender, education, employment status, higher acculturation, lower acculturative stress, and higher life satisfaction would increase refugee parents' likelihood of guiding their children toward effective education and employment pathways. It was also hypothesised that country of origin would not make any difference, as all parents, irrespective of their country of origin, would convey positive employment and education related messages to their children.

Life satisfaction

Werkuyten and Nekuee (1999) defined life satisfaction as "a cognitive judgmental component of subjective wellbeing" (p. 281). In line with Colic-Peisker (2009), we see the 'objective' social aspects of refugee settlement (e.g., employment and building of social networks) as inextricably linked with the 'subjective' psychological aspects or life satisfaction, and connect them through linking refugees' settlement success with life satisfaction.

Keeping in mind that a number of socio-demographic variables promote the resettlement of refugees in a new country, it was hypothesised that: a) Life satisfaction levels would differ significantly on the basis of education, English proficiency and employment status. We expected that those employed, with higher education, and with greater English proficiency would have higher life satisfaction. b) As previous research on gender has shown mixed outcomes, it was expected that life satisfaction would not differ between men and women. Further, as there were relatively few studies about the three country groups covered in this study, a decision was made to explore the differences without hypothesising a direction. c) Finally, we expected that length of stay, acculturation, and resilience would be positively associated, and acculturation stress would be negatively associated with life satisfaction.

Social bridging with the local community

For most refugees, adjusting to a new and vastly different culture can be a difficult and confusing time. There are many pathways that refugees can take which may affect their overall integration experience. In the literature, consideration of the relationship between refugees and host communities is generally represented by issues relating to social harmony, as well as to refugees' participation in the host society. The literature suggests that for all migrants, an important factor in making them feel 'at home' in an area was the friendliness of the people they encountered on a daily basis (Ager & Strang, 2008). Ager and Strang (2008) found that "being recognized and greeted by others in the neighbourhood was greatly valued. Small acts of friendship appeared to have a disproportionately positive impact on perceptions. Friendliness from the settled community was very important in helping refugees to feel more secure and persuading them that their presence was not resented. Conversely, perceived unfriendliness undermined other successful aspects of integration" (p.180). Ager and Strang found that a sense of safety and security was most closely associated with positive judgments of

‘quality of life’ by refugees. Kim (2001) also addresses the importance of interpersonal host communication as part of migrant adaptation into a vastly different culture.

Refugee settlers mainly live in highly diverse neighbourhoods with low socio-economic profiles. This is also where settlement agencies are usually located. In such neighbourhoods, intercultural tension can arise due to different customs and behavioural norms. In response, people may restrict interactions with neighbours; sometimes they are they told that maintaining a limited relationship with neighbours is the ‘Australian way’ (keeping the interaction formal, to a minimum, behave discreetly, e.g., low noise). Such rules may conflict with recent settlers’ cultural norms, for example, a norm of close interaction and mutual help with neighbours. In some societies of origin, neighbours are the first point of immediate social contact and play an important role in each other’s lives. There is no doubt that having a sense of community and having good relationships with neighbours are important aspects of settlement. The language barrier often precludes the building of bridges with neighbours as does cultural distance and knowledge (or lack thereof) of others’ customs and norms.

Data Collection

To collect quantitative data in Year 1, a questionnaire battery was administered to members of three ethnic groups from Burma (Karen, Karenni & Chin) and Ethiopia (Amhara, Tigrians & Oromo), and to respondents originating from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Participants met the following two criteria to be deemed eligible to participate in this phase: a) they had to be a legal guardian/parent of at least one child who was in middle school or above, and b) they had to have been in Australia for at least a year. Those who had been here for less than six months were excluded, as we know the first few months are filled with immediate settlement issues, and we did not want the data to be overly influenced by these issues. Due to the difficulty in recruiting a large sample of people who met *both* criteria, a decision was made to introduce flexibility in the eligibility criteria and to include people who had been in Australia for more than 5 years. The rationale for this decision was that acculturation, gaining employment, and settlement as a whole take time for populations such as refugees, who have been displaced and who may have come from a very different culture.

The data were collected over a period of 10 months (August 2013-May 2014) after we obtained ethics and health and safety clearance from the respective university committees. Our industry partner, Access Community Services Limited (Access), disseminated the information about the study among the communities from Burma, the DRC, and Ethiopia, with whom they have built trusting connections. Access' Bilingual Bicultural Assistants (BBAs) helped with rigorous back translation of the questionnaire battery, organising data collection, working with community leaders, and assisting with interpretation and reading. The time taken to complete the questionnaire varied from 20 to 40 minutes. Each participant received a $20 shopping voucher as a token remuneration.

Qualitative data in Year 2 were gathered with members from Burma (Karen, Karenni and Chin), the DRC and Ethiopia (Amhara and Tigrians) who volunteered to take part in one-on-one interviews. This study sought to gather in-depth narratives from men and women, employed and unemployed, to understand settlement experiences, employment experiences, job aspirations and aspirations for their children's future and intergenerational issues between parents and children. Participants in Year 2 met the same criteria as those in Year 1 (see above).

The data were collected over a period of five months (March 2015-July 2015) after we obtained ethics and health and safety clearance from the respective university committees. Our industry partner, Access Community Services Limited (Access), once again disseminated the information about the study among the communities from Burma, the DRC and Ethiopia. While Access' BBAs from Burma and the DRC assisted with data collection within these two communities, the Ethiopian data were collected with the assistance of a bilingual and bicultural community leader, who was also a doctoral

student at a local university. Specifically, they helped with organising data collection sessions, liaising with community leaders, and assisting with interpretation/translation as and when needed. The interviews lasted anywhere from 16 to 67 minutes (some interviews took less time if both husband and wife were interviewed together, where demographic information was recorded only once). Each participant received a $20 shopping voucher as a token remuneration.

Participants' Demographic Information

Overall, 222 participants took part in Year 1; of these, 51% were from Burma, 31% from the DRC, and 19% from Ethiopia. Fifty per cent of the participants were male, and 50% were female. The mean age of these participants was 42 years (sd = 9 years; minimum 21 to maximum 61 years). The median length of stay in Australia was 5 years. Eighty-six participants had been in Australia for 3 years or less; 55 participants had been in Australia between 4 and 6 years; 79 participants had been in Australia for more than 6 years. Participants from Ethiopia had the longest average length of stay in Australia (10 years) while participants from the DRC had an average length of stay of 6 years, and participants from Burma had on average been in Australia for 4 years.

Table 1: Overview of the sample of participants: Year 1

Country of Origin	Average length of residence in AU (in years)	Median length of residence in AU (in years)	Employed	Average age
DRC	6	5	23	39
Burma	4	3	25	43
Ethiopia	10	10	23	43
Total	**6.6**	**5**	**71**	**42**

In Year 2, data from 47 individual interviews were used for analysis. Of the participants who volunteered to take part in this study, 26 were female and 21 were male; 25 participants were employed and 22 unemployed. Of these participants, 25 were from Burma (Karen, Karenni, Chin), 11 were from Ethiopia (Amhara, Tigrians) and 11 from the DRC. Hence the sample was relatively balanced in terms of gender and employment status. The three specific ethnic communities from Burma were chosen, as they represent the highest intake of refugees from Burma to Australia. The majority of Ethiopian participants were Tigrians, as the Ethiopian BBA had very strong connections with this particular ethnic group.

The Chin participants in our study had spent between 4 and 10 years in refugee camps before coming to Australia. Seven Chin respondents came via India and 3 via Malaysia. All the Karenni respondents in this study had come via Thailand, and spent anywhere between 9 and 12 years in refugee camps. All the Karen respondents also came via Thailand and had spent between 10 and 30 years in refugee camps. All the Ethiopian participants came via refugee camps in Sudan, where they spent anywhere between 2 and 31 years. Similarly, the Congolese participants came via refugee camps in Uganda, Cameroon, Malawi, Burundi, Tanzania, Mozambique, Swaziland, and South Africa where they spent between 1 and 12 years.

Table 2 shows average length of stay in Australia and employment status for all participants.

Table 2: Overview of the sample of participants: Year 2

Country of Origin	Average Length of residence in AU (in years)	Employed female	Employed male	Unemployed female	Unemployed male	Total
Burma	5.3	7	7	7	4	25
DRC	6.0	3	2	3	3	11
Ethiopia	14.4	4	2	2	3	11
Total	**7.6**	**14**	**11**	**12**	**10**	**47**

Employment Experiences

- In Year 1, 32% of participants were employed, and 67.6% were unemployed.

- In Year 2, 53.1% of participants were employed, and 46.8% were unemployed.

- In Year 2, eleven out of 22 unemployed interview participants were unemployed due to their own ill health, or because they were looking after an immediate family member who was ill. Eight participants were also studying, and therefore, could not work or only work part-time.

  One Karenni woman told us that she could not work or study because:

  > *I have to take care of my husband. So I stopped going to school. He is disabled. Not fit.*

- Level of education was a predictor of employment - those who had partially or fully completed high school were more likely to be employed full-time than others; those who had completed tertiary studies were more likely to be employed part-time or self-employed than participants in the other two categories. One Karenni participant who worked in a day-care was given support by her Australian boss so she could work and study a diploma at TAFE.

- The longer the stay in Australia, the better the chances of finding employment.

- English language proficiency (i.e., speaking, writing, and reading) continue to be a key barrier to finding employment.

- A small number of unemployed participants who despite having work experience and educational qualifications were finding it hard to get employment.

  One unemployed Congolese woman had certificates in five disciplines and was still unemployed, and thus very unhappy. The interpreter said:

  > *[She didn't] know why there is no job. She has been applied number of places.*

- An exploration of the relationship between employment and acculturation indicated that employment was sometimes perceived as a factor facilitating acculturation and adjustment to Australia, while in some cases it provoked acculturative stress.

Employment Experiences: Policy Implications

- Many participants worked in specific industries in their home country and had to transition into a job in a different field, resulting in underemployment or underutilisation of skills. It would be useful to review their skills and assist their employment transition into appropriate jobs that match their skills and work experience. Access' Skilling Queenslanders for Work (SQW) Program is an excellent initiative and would be helpful in assisting such people.

- Just as Access' Rural Employment Assistance Program (REAP) has been successful in relocating migrants to rural areas with skills shortages, it would be worth pursuing a similar scheme in regional areas close to Brisbane (Sunshine Coast, Lockyer Valley, etc.) or other metropolitan centres.

- Many unemployed participants who wanted to work were unable to do so because of caring responsibilities. Hence, such refugees could look to work from home. In such cases, a carpooling program, or school buses could help, especially given that many refugee children attend the same school.

- Some refugees were interested in starting their own business. Hence, a select few refugees who want to start their own businesses could be provided with a form of financial support, (e.g., low interest loans to start a small business such as a grocery store).

- Selected participants could be offered monetary assistance to access relevant training and gain skills and certificates.

- Access should continue holding the Queensland Migrant and Small Business Expo and publicise it among all the refugee communities via BBAs, religious leaders, and community congregations.

- Programs such as the ANZ Given the Chance work placement should be continued, as programs such as these may reduce acculturative stress for employed refugees.

Employment and Education Aspirations

- In Year 1, we found that men were more likely than women to have job-related aspirations; however, the interview data in Year 2 did not indicate any gender differences in job aspirations.

- Those who were employed were not as high on the aspiration scale. This might indicate that participants may be content or happy in their current jobs.

  One employed Congolese man was happy with his job, but said he wanted full-time rather than part-time work. He said:

  > *Yeah, I like my job and would like it to be just full-time.*

- Year 2 data indicated that levels of English proficiency affected aspirations. Low levels of English language proficiency held some participants back from moving up the employment ladder, for example, starting their own business, as did poor health, as well as looking after another ill family member.

- In line with Year 1 findings, the qualitative data from Year 2 indicated that levels of aspirations differed among country groups. For instance, some employed Ethiopians appeared to be quite satisfied in their current jobs, and hence, many did not aspire to change jobs.

- Many participants had businesses in their home countries and wanted to start their own business in Australia.

  One unemployed Chin woman said:

  > *Back in Burma we have our own business, like small business. We can work and we can make some money to living. For that we are very unfortunate.*

- Most participants, regardless of their country of origin, did not know how to go about attaining their 'dream job'. In other words, not many participants actually knew what pathways were required to attain their dream job.

  One employed Congolese woman wanted to be an actress but she wasn't quite sure how to go about it. The interpreter said:

  > *Together with that there is a skill or studies education to be an actress. She does not really -she is not yet aware.*

Employment and Education Aspirations: Policy Implications

- As mentioned previously those participants who were caring for a family member we would recommend an improved access to respite care, for example, once a week so they are able to have time off from the care work.

- Many participants simply did not know how to go about pursuing their dream job, hence it would be useful to run a program to help recent arrivals to understand the pathways to employment, for example, learn what educational qualifications are required for certain jobs. Given that almost all participants are church-goers, a good place to hold these sessions could be at places of religious worship, in consultation with religious leaders. An interfaith person would be well suited to conduct such sessions at places of religious worship. Similar sessions could be held during community association meetings when community members meet.

- Given that many participants from all country groups expressed a desire to start their own business but did not know how to go about it, it would be good to organise information sessions where people who have started a business can come in and share their experiences with others. Places of religious worship (after religious service), as well as venues of community association meetings, could be convenient, in consultation with religious and community leaders. Access might consider a pilot loan program with ANZ Bank with whom they have an existing relationship.

- Access should continue the Queensland Migrant and Small Business Expo and publicise it among all the refugee communities via BBAs or religious leaders.

- For those people who lack local work experience and hence are being held back, it would be a good idea to have participants take on apprenticeships or voluntary positions through programs such as Access' Professional Migrant Assistance Program (ProMAP). A few participants already reported taking part in similar schemes, although mainly in informal situations with friends and community members.

- Access could offer a program providing detailed information on how to secure a job at each level of the ANZSCO classifications from managers to labourers, as most participants had aspirations but lack sufficient knowledge and information on the pathways or requirements to achieve their desired jobs.

Life Satisfaction

- There was no difference in life satisfaction on the basis of gender or educational qualifications.

- Participants from Burma reported lower levels of life satisfaction than those from Ethiopia and the DRC.

  One employed Karen man said it was very hard for him in Australia when he first arrived as he didn't know where to go or what to do. He said:

  > *I become - I became like a bit depressed. Yeah, depressed. But now it's a bit better but it's not - it's not perfectly okay.*

- Those with low English language proficiency reported lower levels of life satisfaction.

  One unemployed Karenni woman said:

  > *Yea I'm happy. But the other thing is that I can't speak English so it's hard for me.*

- Employment status was a major determinant of life satisfaction.

- Compared to employed or unemployed participants, participants who were studying had lower levels of life satisfaction perhaps due to having less income.

- Financial difficulties affected perceived levels of life satisfaction among all three country groups.

  An employed Karen man said he was happy to be in Australia, but noted it was hard raising a family on part-time income. He said:

  > *At the moment I feel like okay but not really. I mean my life at the moment is good because live in Australia. I been facing a few challenges because I used to work full-time, but now I only work part-time.*

- Resilience and religion was significantly associated with life satisfaction. Most participants in our study were quite religious and attended religious services on a regular basis. They found that religious services were spaces for social support.

Life Satisfaction: Policy Implications

- Those who were unemployed experienced financial stress (especially those who were ill or caring for ill family members) and their life satisfaction consequently suffered. Finding ways of assisting these people with part-time employment, for example, working from home, would improve their financial and psychological circumstances and no doubt reflect on their levels of life satisfaction.

- Providing some sort of respite services so people who are able to work, while still caring for an ill family member, would enhance the possibility of securing a part-time job, thereby improving levels of life satisfaction.

- English language proficiency affected levels of life satisfaction, hence we recommend offering English language classes for those who despite completing AMEP, were still struggling with basic English.

- For example, local volunteers offering one-to-one or small group classes to adults are a good method of language learning, which could also benefit community connectedness or recent arrivals and build their local ‘social capital’.

- Access can continue more literacy classes just like they are doing in the Logan library with local bilingual communities from Burma. Starting such a program on a larger scale might be worth exploring.

Intergenerational Communication

- We found that employed participants were slightly less engaged in communication with children than those who were unemployed and thus at home.

  One employed Ethiopian mother said:

  > *I don't spend times with my daughter because I'm full-time.*

- In some cases, women appear to be more engaged in communication with their children than men because they were often unemployed and at home. Moreover, it may also be due to their cultural role amongst the communities we studied to nurture and care for the children.

- Acculturation enhanced positive communication; those who were more acculturated had more positive communication with their children.

- Those who reported a high life satisfaction seemed to experience more effective communication with their children.

- Parents were significantly engaged with their children and there were high levels of communication between generations. There was a respectful relationship between children and their parent/legal guardian, as perceived by participating parents; they interacted and were involved in common activities, and parents offered advice. A handful of parents from Burma and the DRC expressed concerns about having a poor relationship with their children. Overall, most families can be described as cohesive with respectfully and positive communication between generations.

  One unemployed Karenni mother said:

  > *Yeah, we usually spend [time together] at home and we watch – I spend time with the children and watch TV.*

- With respect to communication around education/schooling, as expected, those with low levels of English language proficiency were unable to help directly with homework but kept an eye on their children's study patterns when at home.

- Parents were cognizant of cultural differences in terms of disciplining their children.

  One unemployed Congolese father said:

  > *Children were very nice in Africa and they're now changing after we arrived here.*

- Most parents worried about language loss, and thus strongly encouraged their children to speak their native language at home. In families with young children, the children were usually more fluent in English than their mother tongue.

  An employed Chin father said:

  > *I don't want to let my children forget their own language, but outside in locally that's fine, because they will, they will automatically know…*

- Other socio-demographic factors such as age, country of origin, length of stay, English proficiency, education, and confidence about securing employment in future did not play a significant role in predicting positive intergenerational communication.

Parents' Perceptions of Intergenerational Acculturative Differences

- An increase in parents' acculturative stress increased perceptions of dissonance in the parent-child relationship.

- When parents were optimistic about their own employment context, they were less likely to perceive cultural differences as affecting their relationship with their children.

- Most parents and children appeared to be on a similar acculturation trajectory which indicated that most families were a harmonious unit.

- In almost all cases, parents wanted their children to integrate into Australia while still wanting to maintain parts of their original culture such as language, dress, respect for elders, going to church, and food. However, many parents expressed concerns about parenting in a new culture as there was cultural distance between values and norms of acceptable behavior between Australia and their home country.

Intergenerational Communication: Policy Implications

- Most families appear to be harmonious. It is therefore plausible for parents to have positive communication with their children about future employment and educational pathways.

- Access should continue their parenting sessions at local schools to assist parents with information on how to guide children towards achieving their educational and career aspirations.

Intergenerational Communication about Education and Employment Aspirations

- Women showed a trend of having more aspirational communication with children.

- Socio-demographic factors like education, employment status, or length of stay did not influence parents' likelihood of conveying positive work/study messages.

- As participants' acculturation increased, the likelihood of them talking more to their children about education and employment increased.

- Those parents who were confident about their future prospects and perceived themselves as improving their skills and education appeared to be more involved in guiding their children toward effective educational and employment pathways.

- Some parents without an education instilled in their children their aspirations to achieve a higher education than they themselves did.

- Life satisfaction, in the form of being satisfied with finances or relocation, was not associated with this positive communication.

- Almost all parents who took part in this study advocated their children's autonomy in choosing their own career path. In other words, a majority of parents did not want to enforce on their children the aspirations they held for them.

  An employed Ethiopian father said:

  > *This is their home. We don't push them everything, you know.*

- How much contact parents had with schools was directly related to their aspirations for their children's future and in some cases English language proficiency. Increased involvement by parents in their children's lives and school system resulted in greater awareness about their children's education and employment aspirations.

- English language proficiency affected parents' contact with schools (this applies more to participants from Burma).

  One employed Karen father said:

  > *He do not contact the school because cannot speak English.*

- However, looking at all country groups combined, participants did not know much about the Australian education system. Only a few were knowledgeable about what it took to secure a place at university, usually after having met the school counsellor.

  One employed Karenni father simply said:

  > *I don't know anything about the school system, education.*

Intergenerational Communication about Education and Employment Aspirations: Policy Implications

- Some parents mentioned having no or limited contact with schools and/or counsellors due to either their own ill health or English proficiency issues. Hence, many parents were unable to guide their children when it came to their children's educational pathways even though they all had educational aspirations for their children. It may be that even though some schools offer interpreter services, parents are unaware of this. This mainly applies to participants from Burma in our study. Parents should have access to (school's or external) interpreting service because it is important that they are properly informed about their children's progress. Access can play an advocacy role in securing this service for parents.

- Access could explore expanding their homework clubs to various local schools as many parents in this study said they were unable to assist with homework owing to low education and/or language proficiency.

- Access can investigate setting information sessions for parents about their children's access to tertiary education, including the financial cost, which is different for those with citizenship or permanent residence and those without such entitlements.

Social Bridging with Local Community

- Our participants lived in highly diverse neighbourhoods with low socio-economic profiles within the Brisbane, Ipswich, and Logan City Council precincts. Karen participants had the most issues with relationships with neighbours as compared to the Chin or the Karenni participants. Most Ethiopians and Congolese participants also had mostly positive relationships with their neighbours.

- Those who reported having unsatisfactory relationships, restricted their interactions with neighbours; sometimes they were told that maintaining a limited relationship with neighbours is the 'Australian way' (keeping the interaction formal, to a minimum, behave discreetly, e.g., low noise).

- Such rules conflicted with recent settlers' cultural norms, for example, a norm of close interaction and mutual help with neighbours.

- English language proficiency was a big issue in promoting or prohibiting social contact with the local community.

Social Bridging with Local Community: Policy Implications

- Increasingly restrictive migration policies towards asylum seekers and refugees, rising public opposition and negative media coverage in Australia could be at least partly to blame for tensions between recently arrived refugees and their neighbours and local communities. We would recommend designing a media campaign within the city council region showcasing successful stories of refugee settlement, including contributions that refugees have made to local cultural development through participation in cultural events, art and craft (dancing, singing, music performances, food, drama, painting, poetry, etc.).

- Access could initiate programs, in collaboration with other agencies, including local and State governments, to facilitate cultural awareness of diverse populations and learning about one another, as well as promote neighbourhood harmony

- Access could initiate programs with state governments in collaboration with Logan/Brisbane/Ipswich City Councils via their community leaders' forum to facilitate social and cultural bridging within highly multicultural neighbourhoods. They need to secure funding specifically for such a program.

Limitations

1. These findings are based on specific refugee communities and thus cannot be generalised to the population of all the groups who participated in this study.
2. This study was conducted within the Brisbane, Ipswich, and Logan City council areas, and findings may be different for refugee populations living in other parts of Queensland or Australia.
3. Given that statistically refugees have lower employment as compared to the wider Australian population, and since our sample consisted of all refugees, it is likely that our sample is partially skewed towards people with poorer employment outcomes.
4. As with any study with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) populations, language and cultural barriers may have affected the data and data collection. We addressed this issue through the use of bilingual bicultural assistants and through a rigorous translation- back translation processes, but the potential for cross-cultural problems still remains.
5. These findings are based upon self-report data, which means that as with any self-report data collection, there may have been some degree of social desirability bias in participants' responses.
6. We have tried to limit issues with reliability and construct validity in collecting quantitative data, but we are mindful that some refugee participants may find it harder to respond to surveys compared to personal (face-to-face) interviews.

Conclusion

This project investigated the employment experiences and aspirations of refugees in South-east Queensland. The project also contributes in novel ways to the understanding of refugee family communication dynamics. Dysfunctional family communication is likely to exacerbate the problems that refugees and their children experience in school, the employment market and society in general. This study is the first to focus on the impact of family communication on labour market integration. Beyond this, the project is important for both refugee settlers and the larger society, as it explores integration issues at the early stages of refugee arrivals' lives in Australia. Our results may help to refine existing settlement assistance programs and services.

Our findings indicate that, in spite of currently poor employment outcomes and low income in most surveyed families, family harmony did not appear to have suffered greatly. A large majority of respondents aspire to a better job in the future, and are hoping to improve their situation, with a significant minority pursuing further formal education. A large majority reported they encouraged their children to do well in school, and a slightly smaller but still large proportion aspired that their children attend university.

The survey stage of the project, conducted in Year 1, was followed by interviews with a selected sample of respondents. The focus of Year 2 was to gather in-depth narratives that complement the survey findings. The interviews deepened our understanding of employment challenges and aspirations, and the hopes that refugee parents held for the advancement of their children. We were also able to better understand how parents actively support their children in achieving educational success as a main prerequisite for occupational and social mobility in adulthood. The success of the second generation is crucial for the general integration of diverse ethnic communities into the multicultural Australian society and it contributes, in important ways, to the harmony and social cohesion of Australian society.

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Project Outputs (as of February 2016)

Conference papers

Hebbani, A., Colic-Peisker, V., & MacKinnon, M. (2016, July). If you have a neighbour, you know each other, it's like a family: Examining social bridging of refugees in Australia. Paper to be presented at the Congress of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology, Nagoya, Japan.

Khawaja, N., & Hebbani, A. (2016, July). Factors contributing to the life satisfaction of refugees in Australia. Paper to be presented at the Congress of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology, Nagoya, Japan.

Khawaja, N., Hebbani, A., Obijiofor, L., & Gallois, C. (2015, June). *Developing a scale to measure the communication style of parents from refugee background.* Paper presented at the International Academy for Intercultural Research Conference, Bergen, Norway.

Khawaja, N., Hebbani, A., Gallois, C., & MacKinnon, M. (2015, May). *Acculturation as a predictor of employment: An Australian study of refugee communities.* Paper presented at the International Communication Association Conference, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Colic-Peisker, V., & Hebbani, A. (2014, November). *Employment and hopes for the future: Preliminary findings on recently arrived refugee settlers in Greater Brisbane.* Paper presented at the Australian Sociological Association, Adelaide, Australia.

Colic-Peisker, V. (2014, July). *Employment success and long-term aspirations of the first and second generation of recent refugee arrivals: Evidence from Australia.* Paper presented at the International Sociological Association World (ISA) Congress of Sociology, Yokohama, Japan, 13-19 July 2014.

Project Workshop

In November 2015, the research team assembled, together with Access Community Services Limited, for a one-day workshop. In the workshop, we presented key findings from the project and discussed our recommendations, which were refined on the basis of ideas here and other discussions with Access. The purpose of the workshop was to provide a forum for presenting our research and an opportunity for discussion about refugees and related issues. We invited agencies (university academics and researchers), local, state and federal government officers, Access' staff, settlement workers, police, teachers, health and social workers, and community members to participate; 50 people attended.